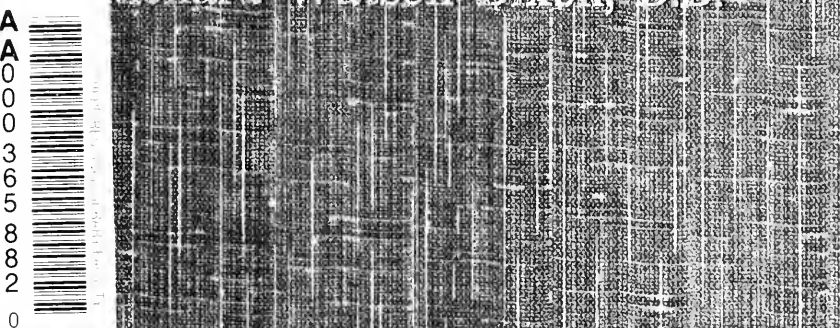


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The Last Poem

of

Richard Watson Dixon, D.D.

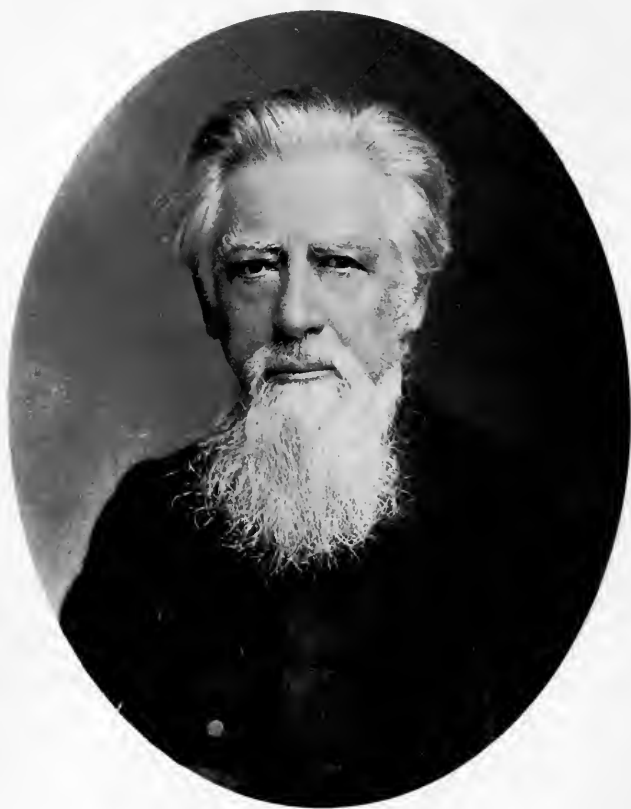




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THE LAST POEMS
OF
RICHARD WATSON DIXON
D.D.

LATE HON. CANON OF CARLISLE AND
VICAR OF WARKWORTH

SELECTED AND EDITED
BY
ROBERT BRIDGES

WITH A PREFACE BY
M. E. COLERIDGE
AUTHOR OF 'THE KING WITH TWO FACES,' ETC.

HENRY FROWDE
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PREFACE

HUNDREDS of years hence, if but one song were left out of the many songs of every poet who has made our age musical, which of them all would be thought the sweetest? How would they compare with the songs of an earlier generation?

It would be hard to find among the lyrics of our own time—or indeed of Shelley's—one more exquisite than this:

‘The feathers of the willow
Are half of them grown yellow
Above the swelling stream;
And ragged are the bushes,
And rusty now the rushes,
And wild the clouded gleam.

‘The thistle now is older,
His stalk begins to moulder,
His head is white as snow;
The branches all are barer,
The linnet's song is rarer,
The robin pipeth now.’

Among the many woods and forests of Victorians—nay, among those of the great forest-lover, Wordsworth himself—where shall we find a statelier forest than we find here?

‘Rise in their place the woods: the trees have cast,
Like earth to earth, their children: now they stand,
Above the graves where lie their very last:
Each pointing with her empty hand
And mourning o’er the russet floor,
Naked and dispossessed;
The queenly sycamore,
The linden, and the aspen, and the rest.’

Among the frequent similes that gem the work of contemporary writers we look in vain for one like this—a simile that might have haunted Keats:

‘the diamond drip
Of a white wing upon a lake struck dead
With shadows.’

No lover of poetry could question the beauty of these fragments; not one but would desire to read more. The appearance of this little volume therefore needs no defence.

But let us deprecate quick judgement! There is a kind of genius that only shows itself to become famous; there is another kind that remains long hidden. Elia said once that every poet asked a different mood in the reader. The high, still mood demanded by these poems is an unearthly, an ethereal temper of mind, free from all base distraction, all trivial, fond excitement. It is a mood that will not come at call unless in the hush of noontide among the mountains, or when the stars are shining at midnight. They are quiet; they make no stir;

they are full of secret beauty that will not unfold itself excepting to the touch of love and reverence. It would be safe to say that the first feeling of nine readers out of ten will be *disappointment*; the second will be *surprise*, the third *ecstasy*. Thus men have often felt—and this has been the order of their feeling—about a picture or a statue of great renown. Defeated first of all by the stupidity of the beholder, the picture or the statue wins in the end. That which a few saw at once, the many come to see, given that they are not blinded by haste or pride. Those who could see at first, the brother poets of this poet, did not fail to understand. Swinburne, Rossetti, Morris, Robert Bridges, men whose praise is not lightly given, praised him. There was one who gave more than praise. A young Oxford student of brilliantly original power loved the poems of Richard Watson Dixon with such devotion that, when he entered the ranks of the Jesuits and was forbidden to take any books with him, he copied out almost all those in his possession. Such minds as these do not labour in vain; others trust in them, follow their lead.

The book appeals, or should appeal, to many; but the closer interest of it will be, of course, for people to whom the author's earlier work is dear. Few traces of the strong pre-Raphaelitism that marked 'Christ's Company' remain. The mystic, passionate religion of the deeper heart is no longer *visible* in signs and symbols, be they as beautiful as

those of 'Mary Magdalene' or of 'St. John'—it is *audible*, it cries aloud in the Hymn beginning 'O Lord my God,' in the sustained, solemn, hierarchical chant of 'Priest of the only Sacrifice.' 'O Lord my God' could never have been written except by one to whom the experiences of the spirit were fact and not conjecture; it has the strangeness, the familiarity, of every word that comes straight from the truth. It is not memory that strikes like a flail; the worst is not the wrong that was, but rather the righteousness that might have been; the suppliant entreats that the future may in its turn become another past, the past that dares assure the future beyond. The poem fitly chosen for the last is not finished, but broken off upon a sacred word that leaves us on our knees. It could not have been finished upon earth. The end is out of sight—beyond. No formal ending could have held the pathos of this. We have overheard a saint in the sanctuary; and we dare hear no more.

We have spoken first of the Hymns, because, to this poet, religion was the life of life. The touch of humanity, which is absent in his dealings with fancied men and women, is never absent from his religious poems; and the men and women of the Bible are almost the only living men and women to be found in his pages. We say *almost*; for who that has read it could forget the singular and awful idyll of the dull innkeeper and his wife, who did not know the churchyard was so near!

- ‘I rode my horse to the hostel gate,
And the landlord fed it with corn and hay :
His eyes were bleary, he limped in his gait,
His lip hung down, his hair was gray.
- ‘I entered in the wayside inn,
And the landlady met me without a smile ;
Her dreary dress was old and thin,
Her face was full of piteous guile.
- ‘There they had been for threescore years,
There was none to tell them they were great,
Not one to tell of our hopes and fears ;
And not far off was the churchyard gate.’

Nothing can beat this for sheer reality ; not Crabbe nor Burns. It shows that no general rule can be formulated about a true poet. During his lifetime he was full of sympathy for every man and woman whom he met ; and perhaps the very sensitiveness of his response to each fellow mortal rendered him cold to men and women whom he had not *seen*—whom he only imagined. Certain it is that he never adorned his landscapes with them, nor let them walk upon the beach when he was writing, as he could write, magnificently, about the sea—that he kept them out of those high-strung Odes in which he sang the conflicts of the soul, the mysteries of nature. There is a fine example before us in the ‘Ode on the Death of Dickens.’ The ‘white precipitate clouds’ are there, the bird with sun-smitten wing, the pink sea-thrift, the heather on the sandhill ; but where is Dickens ? Dickens he had not seen, Dickens was

merely a creature of the imagination. Nobody wants him in the least; he would only spoil the wild, serene loneliness of the Northumbrian coast.

Even where, as in 'Too Much Friendship,' men have the whole canvas to themselves, the poet is interested in them chiefly because they are students, and not in any other sense. The story runs as follows. There are two friends living in Athens—Alcander, a philosopher, and Septimius, a rhetorician come from Rome,

‘In life’s wide lists desirous to be proved.’

‘The god of arts from their arts different’ loved them—it is not very clear why.

‘And still would he that noble calm dispense
Which ’tis the due of youth from life to gain
Before dark Care begin her iron reign
And break the prime.’

The prime did not remain unbroken long. Alcander fell in love with the lady Hypatia.

‘Still great Apollo smiled.’

In fact he was kindness itself, and

‘But for the working of malific powers,
Still had he smiled to watch with godlike heart
The flight of yet another human dart
Shot upward toward the seat of entity
Which all best souls desire; though destiny
Refuse that any reach the traceless shrine.
High gain it is to travel heights divine:
To seek for ever is the joy of thought.’

Alas, as soon as ever Septimius set eyes on the lady Hypatia—or rather she set eyes on him—he knew that he was madly in love with her! At this point the grave Alcander becomes inhuman in the correctness of his attitude. That *magnanimity* should forbid anger, may be right, though we should have chosen a warmer word—his ‘large firm eyes filled with concern and pity,’ are well enough—but the philosophic turn of mind which makes him instantly recall every work that he had ever read on Friendship, the arithmetical nicety with which he balances his emotional account without a thought of the lady, is altogether too Gibbonian. He does not even ‘sigh as a lover’ while he ‘obeys’ as a friend. This is not ‘Too Much Friendship,’ it is ‘Too Much Philosophy.’ No doubt the problem, for any one who cares about friendship, is harder than it looks at first sight. Shakespeare himself came to grief over it in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*; but Valentine’s impetuous offer of Sylvia to Proteus, though loyalty cries out against it, rings true beside this calculated and selfish self-denial. Hypatia, very naturally, seems to have been glad of the exchange; but Hypatia’s kinsmen took a different view, and they made the life of Alcander a burden to him.

‘The words the words pursued.’

His own words were not of the least avail, and at last he was sold for a slave; but still Apollo went smiling on, and Alcander communed with books and

wrote on frizzled skins and kept himself alive with Hope.

‘ Hope who still drops her anchor in life’s sand,
 And to firm hold the atoms loose would band,
 That life’s tossed ship outride the tempest’s rage ;
 Hope, that to ease turns pain, to youth turns age :
 Hope, that in mortal nature so is fixed,
 That no damned wretch in misery’s mortar mixed,
 No sodden villain brought to extreme shame,
 Would change to other, and not be the same :
 Albeit both high and low would willingly
 Add to themselves another’s share of good,
 Desiring this man’s fame, and that man’s wealth,
 Yonder man’s beauty, and that other’s health ;
 So they these goods upon their own might pile,
 But never cease to be themselves the while :
 Hope bade him live.’

Whether a desperate criminal is in truth so fond of his own identity, we may not pause to consider. Alcander, at any rate, thought he had no need to be ashamed of his ; he escaped, carrying his precious books along with him, and fled to Rome.

‘ But on the wanderer of that mighty town
 Nonesmiled : none spake him ere the sun went down . . .
 Hungry and spent he leant against the walls,
 And felt how cold the warmth of alien halls,
 How hard Rome’s pavement to a foot unshod ;
 Mailed should they be on those proud streets who trod.’

He went to sleep in a tomb outside the city, his head on an inverted urn ; but he slept very well indeed. Nothing could make that man uncomfortable, so

long as he had his books. At dawn the people, finding a dead body without the entrance, somewhat rashly concluded that he was a murderer, and dragged him before Septimius, who was now the head of the Roman bar. It is to be conjectured that he had to leave all the books behind him, for now at last he is quite overcome, and says not a word in his own defence. The voice of his friend is pronouncing sentence when the real murderer is brought in. The judge at the same moment recognizes his ancient comrade (why did he not know him before? it makes one suspect his acuteness as a detective), and

‘joy was the charioteer
When, in the sight of mighty shouting Rome,
Septimius led Alcander to his home.’

Once more Apollo smiled—he smiles as often as Hamlet’s uncle—and we look to hear that they all lived happy ever after. No such thing! Love, who was much annoyed, gave Fortune a good scolding, and

‘Sought his kinsman Death, of aspect wild,
Who seemed as fair as he—as fair a child
As ever at a wedding feast flung flowers,
Or danced about the circle of the Hours.’

Of course, just when Love fell upon him, Alcander was extremely happy. He had possessed himself of his beloved books again. Could there be a sweeter description of the tranquil life of the student?

‘Twas such a day when our Athenian
 Most blessed his lot ; when he had power to scan
 The ways of being with art’s happiest might,
 Luxuriously severe ; though subtle, bright.
 Caverned he sat, Alcander, with his books
 Amid the rocks where flow the Tiber’s brooks,
 Inrunning with short course into their stream
 Far from the town ; for he in blissful dream
 Had wandered from the gatherings of mankind,
 Following the airy beacons of the mind.’

Love shot him ; and he went mad—went mad too
 with an odd touch of pre-Raphaelitism.

‘His mighty limbs, with muscles hung, were seen
 Strange-coloured midst the dark rock-mosses green.’

The cold-hearted behaviour of Septimius and Hypatia at his death makes one hope that *they* did not live happy ever after ; but there is little doubt that they did, they were so perfectly philosophical. The high-hearted passages contained in it save the life of the poem ; but the men are nought, the women less than nought. And there are no others anywhere else in the book. It has been dwelt on at some length chiefly because those which follow defy analysis. The sublime stanzas called ‘To the Earth Planet’ have caught the music of the rolling spheres themselves ; they move with a majestic force that challenges the power of language.

‘Time is their lord—their prison Space.’

Thus Dante may have felt ; thus Milton, when

he was lost, not in the sight but in the thought of stars. The other side of this transcendent rapture is mirrored in 'The Silent Heavens'—the horror of the aimless, voiceless, never-ceasing motion of these great 'slaves of light' that once were fixed about the World of Man, and friendly. There is no doubt that, to a few hearts even now, the restoration of the Ptolemaic system would come as a relief; they would be glad to see the Universe with the Earth in the centre, the central story of the Earth the story of all things, as Dante saw, as Milton never could feel quite sure that he did not see it.

'Dust and Wind' contains a Hamlet-like meditation on the mystery of the human form and its dissolution. The poet watched the Dust and the Wind as they gave shape to each other; he describes it in a simile that comes home with startling force to any one who has watched a sandstorm.

'A rushing archer seems this dust that doth arise,
His bow in the whirl is bent, his arrows seek
the eyes.'

The shape is lost, the atom remains. The subtle speculations that follow are hard to understand, but they are haunting; they compel the reader to return again, again, and yet again; the awful burden of the faithfulness of the Dust to man, of the unfaithfulness of the Wind, possesses the mind like some weird incantation. The final flight of the Wind, when

‘He upseals the evening sky with the chilly roses of
 eve,
 Pressed far on the infinite blue’

comes with the restfulness, the freshness of a strong sunset-breeze by the sea. ‘The Unknown King’ has the fantastic reality and unreality of nightmare—the end appears to be conceived in a different mood from the beginning. We turn from it for comfort to the lovely Sonnets ‘Hope’ and ‘Peace’—to the sweet murmur of ‘Low River,’ where every chosen word satisfies eye and ear alike, until we hardly know whether the picture be the fairer, or the song.

A life-like article by Canon Beeching in *The Dictionary of National Biography* will give some idea of the character of the poet to those who were not acquainted with him. They may learn yet more from his own contributions to the *Lives* of two of his intimate friends, Burne-Jones and William Morris. In a Prize Poem of earlier date, ‘St. John in Patmos,’ written when he was Master of Carlisle Grammar School, occur these lines :

‘For they are ever honoured most who lean
 To human wants from out that cloud serene
 Of solemn thought, in which they fain would dwell,
 But that the world hath need of them to quell
 Its anarchies: they who with burning heart
 Came down their own strong essence to impart,
 And labour noblest things to keep alive:
 True men of action, though contemplative.’

PREFACE

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We cannot read the passage without a vivid recollection of him who wrote it—of his devoted ministry by the gleaming waters, under the shadow of the ancient church at Warkworth. Deep in the heart of one who saw him he left the impression of that rare humility which is the highest worth of man. Humility, in him, was not a hard-won grace, a virtue won and worn after defeat upon defeat in life's battle—it was a thing innate and perfect.

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TOO MUCH FRIENDSHIP

THE STORY

OF

SEPTIMIUS AND ALCANDER



WHEN Athens, fallen beneath the Roman sway,
Kept still the relics of her bygone day,
The youth who most adorned her sacred hill
Was named Alcander: by Apollo's will
Votive to those high arts the god has given
To penetrate the ways of earth and heaven:
To whom no less the blind wheel-goddess spared
Her largess lavish; so that few compared
In happiness with him, and one alone
His rival in men's expectation shone. 10
This was Septimius, who, of Roman name,
To Athens o'er the Tyrrhene waters came,
And held in rhetoric renown as high
As the other equalled in philosophy,
Nor lacked there kindness between the two
From first, which into closest friendship grew.
The god of arts from their arts different
Inspired them peace, and benediction sent:

And in his sphere, the intellectual sky
Bade his satellites move in harmony. 20

Long lingered they in youth's fair indolence,
And still would he that noble calm dispense
Which 'tis the due of youth from life to gain
Before dark Care begin her iron reign,
And break the prime: but ah! there came at length
The breaking time: when youth his fiery strength
To match against the awaiting world is moved,
In life's wide lists desirous to be proved.

And first Alcander found it: he in thought 29
Transfixed would stand, into grave ardour wrought
And musings many: oft would bow his head
Severely pressed, as with a weight of lead,
Pondering what road to take, what thing to do
To tune his studies old to action new,
And be a man amid the world of men.
Often he muttered low, oft seized his pen,
Traced and then tore the workings of his brain,
While newborn joy sank into doubt again.
Apollo smiled watching the noble strife,
Thinking to hold his votary through life, 40
Deeming occasion would but interpose
To crown his favourite son, what'er he chose.

But who can scape desire? who can be free
Of Nature's bonds, how great so'er he be?
Amid his mind's unrest Alcander saw
Hypatia, and he bowed to Nature's law:
Hypatia, fairest of the lovely train
That wandered round Lucina's golden fane,

Drawn by the queen of marriage still more near
Her shrine itself with each new budding year. 50
Into his heart, transported through his eyes
Her lovely image fluttered, there to rise,
The flower of love in wisdom's ordered seat.
For she to him refused not answer meet,
And all sped well, and hindrance was there none;
Ere in short space, the previous rites o'ergone
Of hymeneal, came the day ordained
Whose evening should bring home the bride
unstained.

Yet, since fair fortune in the marriage joys
Upbuilds the mind's dominion, not destroys, 60
Still great Apollo smiled, nor deemed that he
Should lose the subject of his sovereignty :

Nor would he, in respect of those mild hours,
But for the working of malific powers.
Still had he smiled to watch with godlike heart .
The flight of yet another human dart
Shot upward toward the seat of entity,
Which all best souls desire ; though destiny
Refuse that any reach the traceless shrine.
High gain it is to travel heights divine : 70
To seek for ever is the joy of thought,
The joy of gods for ever to be sought.
But other thing befell : that shall be told.

Septimius, in the easy weeks that roll'd
From roused Alcander to his marriage day,
Kept unconcerned at first his usual way,
Practising his mimic pleadings with renown

That lightened through the sophist-loving town :
Waiting till sails should come to waft him home
To the wide law-courts of Imperial Rome. 80
Not needing, like his friend, to arbitrate
'Twixt past and present at a troublous date,
Since his less lofty science set no bar
Betwixt his mind and the dark human war.
Yet Fate to him brought woe, and by the same
Event that to his friend unhindering came.
Of purpose high.

To him Alcander brought
His own betrothed in proud and happy thought
That he might share his joy, he whom he deemed
His only fellow, and o'er all esteemed. 90
Septimius saw ; and, lo, from liquid eyes
Bright beyond praise, shot through his arteries,
All in a flash, one glance that woke in him
Strange trouble, and his senses made to swim,
As if some poison thinned to fire his blood,
Then hurled it through him in a raging flood :
In that one look he read, though 'twas but one
Of any from such eyes that must be thrown,
Piteous appeal, disdain, command, whate'er
Makes man's emotion thrall to beauty's snare. 100

An unseen power it was that wrought this ill
Blindly enacting destiny's wide will :
For Cupid, who is oft good Hymen's foe,
Hung in the clouds that hour with new-strung bow :
'Twas spring time, when his shafts he best may wield
Against the creatures of the air and field.

He laughed to see the finch his mate pursue
Wing-stroke for wing-stroke o'er the bushes new :
The wild cat in the thicket crying loud
Under the sting : the bull, so royal proud, 110
Tearing the furrow in his savage need :
'The horse that sprang, then tried again to feed,
'Then raced his pasture's length against the wind.
So dealt he forth his plague on every kind.
'Twas he who noting that one look unmeant
In the same flash his own sharp arrow sent.

Cureless was such a wound ; but not the less
Septimius strove his torment to repress.
'What caitiff I,' so to himself he said,
'My own best brother's bride that shall be led, 120
In maddest thoughts to hold !' Then gan he try
Studies and fasts to heal his malady
And struggled sore : sometimes he leaped upright
Crying, 'I love her not ! in love's despite
I love her not ! no plague have I to shun' :
Like to maimed men, who think that they can run,
Minding their former lightness, while they deem
'Their real misery some unhappy dream.
But soon again Love with descending frown
Into his pit of horror struck him down, 130
And all his fancied sanity o'erthrew.
'The thirling dart again he inly knew,
Again he felt the beat of love and pain,
And shame went through him, and remorse again.
So that at last both strength and heart gan fail :
A fever came to him : his visage pale

And shaking limbs did all his friends aghast.
And thence so swiftly did his body waste,
That on the morn, whose evening would bring bride
To bridegroom's bed, they looked he should have
died. 140

Meantime Alcander, in love's ecstasy,
Observed him little: for with feigned glee
The sick man greeted him whene'er they met.
But on the morn, that was for marriage set,
Speeding to him the first, he found him dressed
In the rich raiment of a wedding guest,
So dressed indeed for welcoming of the day.
But the rich garment served so to display
His ghastliness of feature and of hue,
That the amazed Alcander at the view 150
Felt sudden awe, and to demand began
Whence 'twas his friend appeared a dying man.
He with evasions wild and stammering strove
To escape confession of unwilling love;
And with a dreary smile to cross the floor
Urged his weak limbs, to win the open door,
And bade him follow to the marriage fest,
Nor be behind his day. But the poor jest
Failed as he spoke it; Love so terribly
Shook him, that it no more might hidden be: 160
And turning with a deadly look he said,
'Alcander, in my soul's despite and dread
'Thy lady so I love, that night nor day
Her image from my thoughts may pass away:
Yea truly in the phantasies of sleep

She doth pursue me : her by day I keep
Still in my ken : the pain that me doth kill
Is sprung of this : I have no other ill.
I cannot name her, lest from me should burst
Wild callings on her name. I am accursed 170
Of heaven to be a traitor to my friend.
Now slay me here, and of this woe make end.'

The grave Athenian youth this agony
Heard all unmoved : for magnanimity
Anger forbad : concern and pity filled
His large firm eyes, masterly virtue's guild.
In consultation with himself he stood,
And argued with his mind against his blood,
Recalling many tractates, ancient codes
Of noble friendship, panegyric odes 180
By poets made of constancy sublime
Which friend to friend had shown in ancient time :
How one had given his life to save his friend,
How some had shared their fortunes to the end :
How friendship was more precious to the wise
Than Indian gold or eastern merchandise :
How one had written that a mistress fair
Should with a friend be held of no compare,
For that a mistress any day is won
But to repair a friend remaineth none. 190
These and much more regathering in his mind,
At length he spake : 'Septimius, thou art kind
Giving me warrant to confer a boon,
A wedding day is hasting to the noon
But not the bridegroom I, though she the bride,

For whom the flowers fall thick from side to side.
Hypatia name I thine: receive from me
A gift that answers well my thoughts of thee.'

Who that is set in strait 'twixt death and love
But must refuse the bat and take the dove? 200

Septimius, gazing on that lofty face

Where greatness occupied in passion's place,

Bowed to the boon, though tear arose on tear,

And 'twas remorse to feel his joy so dear.

Some gifts there are, that he who offers makes

Refusal wrong, he honours best who takes.

So to make short the story of that day,

When to the nuptial feast they took their way,

He held the bridegroom's room: nor she denied

To yield into his arms a willing bride. 210

Therewith Apollo smiled upon his son,

Deeming his doubtful victory twice won,

And love removed better than love retrieved,

For the great ends which he in him conceived.

He smiled: but as his smile shot through the cloud

Discovered Cupid fled, sobbing aloud,

Where secretly all-armed above the earth

He flew, and saw the spoiling of his mirth,

And the calm bosom of the Athenian.

Handling his vengeful bolts he flew and ran, 220

And woe betide Apollo's votary,

If him unfenced in wisdom's panoply

He ever mark: such spiteful rage he fed

Finding his former arrow idly sped,

Alcander having plucked it from his breast,

And e'en Septimius' grief too soon redressed.
Great Master of the Muses, hast not thou
Felt in thy heart that torturing barb? then how
Safety to mortal man canst thou ensure
And bid life's game be without forfeiture? 230

Who now so lightsome as Septimius,
When his mad sorrows were concluded thus?
For Rome he sailed, departing with his bride,
Blessing Alcander, who with smiles replied,
And with unruffled brow beheld the prore
Rise to the sea beneath the quickened oar.
Anon in the great city of the hills
Septimius' praised name all hearing fills:
No orator like him the forum swayed,
To him the gathered gowns with awe obeyed; 240
The offices of state to him stand wide,
The open gates for Fortune's flowing tide:
Lovely Hypatia, who his honour shares,
By her fine wit more high the structure rears;
High suitors throng his ivory chair around,
And all the city to his will he found.

Meanwhile revengeful Love, to exact his due,
With Fortune joined, Alcander to pursue.
When Athensward from the bleak shore he hies,
E'en there the fickle goddess through the skies 250
Rattled her keys ('twas she indeed who thus,
Combined with Love, upraised Septimius),
And the same hour her favourite downwards thrust
Upon that wheel that turns 'twixt cloud and dust.
A sleety shower blew up, with bitter wind:

Low thunders growled in the clear blue behind.
But angrier were the faces that he met,
When in the town's fair street his feet he set.
The kinsmen of Hypatia, a dark band,
Frowningly met him: nor aside would stand, 260
Nor scarce give way when he looked pleasantly.
And after him sent shouts of 'Villany,'
And 'Go thou villain of a filthy trade,'
And 'There goes he who hath his bride betrayed
And from a lover rich acquired base gain.'
He pondering the moment in disdain
Of ill construction, soon resumed his road,
Wrapped in high musings, toward his own abode.

But in a little while he found not vain
The menaces of that incensèd train. 270
A suit at law was brought, the vile pretence
That he had sold his bride for recompense
Of money given: doing despite and scorn
To all her kin: such crime was laid and sworn,
And in indictment vast was spread the feud
At legal length: the words the words pursued.
In vain he pled: no eloquence had power
Against the frown of all, and in an hour
He was cast down from fortune and from fame
In such a mulct, that the extremest shame 280
Alone awaited him, exposed to stand
A slave for purchase at the bidder's hand.
A Thracian merchant bought him, and he went
O'er wintry seas from shame to banishment.
Unhappy man! like the inclement shore

That took him, was the rigorous doom he bore.
O'er the cold hills it was his part to lead
At break of day his master's flock, and feed :
To follow in the snow along the waste
Afoot his horse's heels, while on he paced : 290
And every season both in frost and heat,
Extremest both the most, his toils repeat :
And for himself to trap the deer and bear,
Or in the frozen river leave his snare
Ere to his tasks he went : that with such pain
Precariously his life he might sustain.
Over his own unfriended head the roof
He reared, which kept the winds of night aloof.
But still Apollo smiled : 'Now shall be known,'
Mused he, 'the greatness of my favourite son : 300
Penury, slavery, shall only prove
How fixed in heart the virtue which I move.'
And so indeed it seemed : cramped and constrained,
Steadfast to science still the man remained :
Some loftier moments snatching, he by stealth
Communed with books, the remnants of his wealth,
In secret haunts : and on rough tablets wrought,
Or frizzled skins, the minutes of his thought :
And this contented him ; one moment's scope
For days of toil, held him alive through hope. 310
Hope who still drops her anchor in life's sand,
And to firm hold the atoms loose would band,
That life's tossed ship outside the tempest's rage :
Hope, that to ease turns pain, to youth turns age :
Hope, that in mortal nature so is fixed,

That no damned wretch in misery's mortar mixed,
No sodden villain brought to extreme shame,
Would change to other and not be the same:
Albeit both high and low willingly would
Add to themselves another's share of good, 320
Desiring this man's fame, and that man's wealth,
Yonder man's beauty, and that other's health;
So they these goods upon their own might pile,
But never cease to be themselves the while:
Hope bade him live; and Hope at length bequeathed
As dying givers do, her promise breathed,
Dying to give what could not be outlived,
But, unlike givers, in her death revived:
She died in certainty: but, knowing then
Her gift unlike all other gifts, that men 330
Die if she live not, dying rose once more
Living, to bid him live, as heretofore.
For, on a day when most he felt his chain,
He found it loose! the everlasting strain
Suddenly ceased; and he was free to fly.
The watchdog slaves, who still beset him nigh,
Were with their master fierce withdrawn away,
Forgetting him some hours that happy day:
He snatched his books and fled: and many a length
Of wild and waste he went, the hilly strength 340
Of Rhodope and Haemus, where the blast
Blows clearest, or with sudden change o'ercast,
The sky hurls darksome white: where ice and snow
Make alternation, as the wild winds blow.
Long was his flight: he day by day lay hid

In trees and caves; and walked when Hesper bid
With westward course, to reach the Ausonian
 plains:

And now, descending, the last goal he gains,
And stands in Rome itself, amazed and blind
Amid the mighty concourse of mankind. 350

Beside the Virgin's Fount he sets him down,
Viewing the dwellers of the high-built town:
The innumerable youth who in the Martial space
Hurl dart, toss disk, contend in breathless race;
The civic crowd which in the forum meet,
The slave-borne litters tossing through the street;
The flute-led worshippers who slowly march
To disappear beneath some temple's arch;
The sculptured walls, the bastions gathered high
From side to side across the purple sky. 360

But on the wanderer of that mighty town
None smiled: none spake him ere the sun went down.
Though hope had sent him there perchance to find
His friend, and her whom he to him resigned.
Hungry and spent he leaned against the walls,
And felt how cold the warmth of alien halls,
How hard Rome's pavement to a foot unshod;
Mailed should they be on those proud streets who
 trod.

Then in the growing darkness he was fain
To seek that haunt of misery and pain, 370
Which oft, ere death, the sleep of death would give
By night to wretches who with morning live,
And to the outside tombs his steps to turn,

Where with his head on an inverted urn
More sweetly slept he than down-pillowed guilt
Sleeps in the palace which itself hath built.

But innocence the show of guilt may wear
If guilt like innocence too oft appear,
For, as it happed, unto that very stead
Wherein Alcander lay, two robbers fled, 380
There to divide the spoil which they had pilled;
Who quarrelling, the one the other killed,
And left him there: the morning came and lit
With light the corpse, as he had slaughtered it
In the tomb's entrance: they who saw went in
And found Alcander wrapped in sleep within:
So deeming that the murderer they had found,
They dragged him forth, with chains his hands they
bound.

And he in silence standing, and dark mood,
As it had been another there who stood, 390
Both let them bind the chains about his hands
And drag him through the streets: anon he stands
In the wide law-court mid the clamouring throng,
Mute, making no defence, careless of wrong,
Scorning denial, for misfortune's blow
Had turned to stone his heart his rags below.

He heard the charge preferred, the proof made
plain,
Nor aught of vindication would he deign,
Nor break his bitter silence; so that all
Hungred for some sharp doom on him to fall, 400
And such malicious silence overcome:

On racks the lame man leaps, and sings the dumb.

The judge began his sentence to declare :
And when that voice first rose upon the air,
He started at the sound, nor could forbear
One moment's eyeflash toward the ivory chair.
Septimius was the judge ! The haggard man
Thought to proclaim himself an instant span,
But then : 'No, no : heaven has in me designed
The perfect pattern wretch of all mankind, 410
I will not baulk it : well, 'tis well, that he
Should cast me forth to death and infamy
To whom I gave my best, through whom I fell
From wealth to wretchedness : yes, this is well ;
And better, in that if I called his name,
That word would ransom me from perilous shame.
I make no sign.'—Clear, calm, and regular
The voice rolled on that ruled the Roman bar.

But ere it ended, lo, a new surprise 419
Broke the high accents, and drew all men's eyes.
Shouts rose without, and tumult spread around,
And in was brought another prisoner bound,
The real slayer of his robber fere ;
Who, selling in the town their plundered gear,
Being caught confessed the crime : the crime
confessed,

Alcander's innocence left manifest.

And all men marvelled, that, when death had played
So close with him, he nor defence had made
Nor aught abated his fixed countenance,
So wronging innocence in his own chance. 430

But greater marvel was the judge to see
Rise sudden from his place of majesty,
And to the prisoner making way full fast,
In strict embrace his arms about him cast :
Septimius hailed Alcander ; and with tears
Recalled the benefit of former years ;
And with consent of all the concourse there
Took off his chains : joy was the charioteer
When, in the sight of mighty shouting Rome,
Septimius led Alcander to his home. 440

And now Apollo smiled indeed, at last
Deeming his son secure through peril past,
And straitlier trained his favourite votary.
Safe were the books of his philosophy,
The precious load to which he still had clung,
When in adventurous shift his life had hung.
Now should the glorious schedule be complete
Which should uplift him to the heavenly seat
Of everlasting fame, mid those allowed
(How few !) to issue from the mortal crowd. 450

For he, in philosophic garment dressed,
Steps through the Roman halls, an honoured guest,
To mildness all restored and dignity,
And high in state as is Septimius high :
In look more noble than the Academe
Beheld him once, and old Ilissus' stream,
When him to greet the fair Hypatia came,
Whom he had yielded then in friendship's name,
More beautiful for marriage, in such stole
As Portia wore, great Cato's other soul, 460

Or sad Volumnia hid her sweetness in.
He met her with a smile, nor felt within
Trouble of soul, regret, remorse, or care :
Nor, having in full sight her beauty rare,
Doubted that, if such choice returned again,
His part should be that which it had been then :
And the great power, all jealous of his own,
Who had slain Marsyas, gloried in his son.

But now came up the doom long gathering
Against the mortal who had dared to fling 470
The boon of Love away, with purpose high,
Beyond man's scope, preferring friendship's tie.
Virtue, that was the blazon of his deed,
Incensed the powers still more—they who succeed
To every vacant place of empire
In man, advancing their ascendancy
With watchful gaze. The injured god of love
With his ally blind Fortune chode and strove :
To whom he said, 'Returning on thy wheel
Thou bringest back this man from woe to weal 480
Contrary to our pact : but still remains
My due of penance and exacted pains :
I seek an aid beyond thy transient power.'
Light-winged he flew, leaving her cloudy bower,
And sought his kinsman Death, of aspect mild,
Who seemed as fair as he—as fair a child
As ever at a wedding fest flung flowers,
Or danced about the circle of the Hours.
With him he long conferred : and thence he sped
To the pale Graiae in their weaving shed, 490

Who sighing gave consent to that he bade.
The Acidalian mountain next he made,
Where his own mother lay in sweets dissolved,
Whose humid eyes in flames as quick revolved :
With her he lastly planned a pageantry
By which his grief surely avenged might be.

'Twas such a day when our Athenian
Most blessed his lot : when he had power to scan
The ways of being with art's happiest might,
Luxuriously severe ; though subtle, bright. 500
Caverned he sat, Alcander, with his books,
Amid the rocks where flow the Tiber's brooks,
Inrunning with short course into their stream
Far from the town : for he in blissful dream
Had wandered from the gatherings of mankind,
Following the airy beacons of the mind.
There as he sat alone, the Destinies
Began to work Love's ruinous ministries,
Which were prepared : they sighed while their
thin hands,

Distant but strong, undid the filmy bands 510
Which hid the ready doom. From off the sky
The spacious clouds that summer hung on high
Rolled largely off : and in the space between
Fair Venus and her dove-drawn car were seen.
Her rolling eyes were sweet, her hair was spread
In pearls and gold around her glorious head :
Wide flowed her crimson mantle ; round her waist
The cestus, fatal zone, with care was placed :
Which whoso saw straightway in frenzy fell

For beauty's sake (so powerful was the spell), 520
And, if of mortal mould, grew sane no more.
Slack in her hands the crimson tape she bore
With which her loving pair the chariot drew,
Whose dainty wings flashed in the heavenly blue.
Above her flew all-armed her cruel son,
Poising a gift that he from Death had won,
A bolt of serpent power, which unespied,
Painless, unfelt, would through the vitals glide.

Soon as Alcander saw this fleeting show
He left the place where he reclined below 530
Gazing the Paphian queen with ravished eyes,
The while she flitted through the opened skies
And entered the receiving cloud again.

Then flinging up his arms in rapturous pain
He at the instant took the arrow keen
While madness seized him: through his breast
unseen

The streak went reckless: leaping with a shout
All frantic from the cave he issued out,
And on the shore in furious wise began
Laughing aloud: among the rocks he ran 540
Laughing aloud, louder, with fury more
His precious books, Apollo's due, he tore
Piecemeal, and sent them fluttering down the wind,
And cried with roaring voice, 'Thus I unbind,
Thus, thus, the cursèd load which I have borne.
These sophistries, that are free Nature's scorn
By cheating demons forged: hence, hence away,
Away I give you to the winds that play,

As from the hawker's hand the tame prey-bird 549
Is tossed to the air : but, tongueless hence, unheard;
Yet prey no more, though air-tossed : off ! nor add
Your woes, your rigours to man's heart made mad
By griefs enough themselves : I who have stored
Your villanies, scatter the rotten hoard,
Lies, sophistries, shackles for poor man's use,
Hence, hence, hence ! Waking from the mind's abase,
Jocund, content, and frolic, lo, I sing
Songs of high comfort : O, the heavens shall ring
Hypatia, sweet Hypatia ! ' Thus he cried
Among the dun rocks by the riverside : 560
And rending off his garments now began
To dance all naked where the river ran.
His mighty limbs, with muscles hung, were seen
Strange-coloured midst the dark rock-mosses green,
And soon were torn by stones and trailing brier :
But still he danced and cried : nor might respire
From that strange rapture, till an answering shout
Rose from the uplands near : anon a rout
Came hurrying into sight, the shepherd folk 569
Chased him and hemmed him, and their cudgels broke
On his defenceless limbs : he lay at last
Wounded to death : the fit was overpassed ;
Love's vengeance was complete : and now the sum,
Except the very end itself, was come.
Love smiled to accomplish this : Love gave him
 breath,
And handed him to reason ere his death :
He knew before his fixing eyes grew dim,

Septimius and Hypatia knelt by him.

They reasoned too, as on his death they gazed :
Love sent one thought that both their bosoms
 raised, 580

And out of being smote the only good
That he in all had gained, their gratitude.
'So is it best for us,' Septimius said.
Hypatia looked, and nodded o'er the dead.

LOW RIVER

SO high the river wont to rise
 When wintry rains his wells increase,
 Now lowly in his channel lies
 That summer bids his torrent cease.

And now all day his stony bed
 Glares to the sun in ruin wide:
 There pebble-heaps and wastes are spread,
 Which once were shallows in the tide.

Great boulders standing gaunt and bare
 Seem to expect their watery screen, 10
 And cast their strong sharp shadows where
 Their dancing image late was seen.

But thread-like still comes on, glints low,
 And breaks not continuity,
 The thin, persistent, glistening flow
 That makes the river river be ;

And to the strewage says, 'Not long
 Shall wait my organ of fine tones,
 Ere I return in volume strong
 To wake your music, wistful stones.' 20

DUST AND WIND

THE dust takes form of the wind, that bloweth
 where it lists ;

The wind takes form of the dust, that maniacally
 resists :

The wind takes form of the dust, as the soul takes
 form of the clay ;

A spectral form it is, and quickly it fades away.

A rushing archer seems this dust that doth arise :
 His bow in the whirl is bent, his arrows seek the eyes :
 A myriad myriad atoms compose his transient form.
 Gathered between the flower of the grass and the
 root-gnawing worm.

Then he falls at once, and lies scattered on the plain :
 A myriad made his form : I take a single grain : 10
 'Tis greater than the whole ; an atom infinite :
 Will it yield up that which dwells within it, as I
 write ?

Yes, there blooms within it invisible a flower,
 Rooted in the atomy clod, which bloomed in its own
 hour :

And in the unending dance of days shall bloom again
 In that wild resurrection which ever is joy with pain.

'Twas once compacted well in a form of bone and
brain;

It went therefrom in its season, but the form did
still remain :

The form itself was dissolved, and gathered to the
grave ;

And this atom of it, perchance, clung round the
charnel cave. 20

'Tis still the law of things that the atom resëek the
whole

In the atom-built world of death : but what of the
life, of the soul ?

Whither retires the force, that gradual leaves the
limb ?

Whither returns the fire, when the eye begins to dim ?

This is the secret thing that still to the dust adheres :
It is force, the thing that not fails when the atom
disappears :

Which when it departs at length, departs by a secret
course :

It is the wonder of power and the miracle of force.

The limb begins to fail, but retains its bulk and size :
The sight grows dim, but still stand bright and full
the eyes. 30

When the limb begins to fail, whither doth force
retire ?

And when the eye grows dim, whither returns its
fire ?

In a spirit-atom world do they reseek the whole?
And, as they thither depart, posts after them the
soul?

Rejoin they the soul again, which they have fled
before,

Mysterious light and might, to quit it never more?

Ah who can measure spirit, or compass force and
power?

Is that the secret of dust, is that the invisible flower,
Which methought I saw unfurled in the atom lifeless
and cold,

Because anciently some soul in form did that atom
hold?

40

Canst thou, oh atom, tell; oh, wilt thou hear thy
name,

Why after losing thee the form remained the same?

Why, after losing others that took thy place and
part,

The force fell from the limbs, the form died round
its heart?

Oh, thou wilt answer not, thou keepest thy secret
still;

Get thee back to the phantom crowd, that the wind
whirls at his will:

Thy flower is unopened yet, or else invisibly blooms,
As the voice of the bat that at evening wails weakly
by the tombs.

Oh, dust, thou art faithful still to man, to the tribes
of earth :

Thy dark and dreadful silence forbiddeth not other
birth ; 50

And that future birth shall be, for the former things
remain,

Ever that resurrection, which is unto joy with pain.

But now, oh what of the wind, that uplifteth thy
multitudes ?

Is he too, faithful to earth, and to earth's unhappy
broods ?

Is the wind content to breathe, like the voiceless
voice of the dust,

The story of joy with pain, and of justice made
unjust ?

Nay, gone he is full far, since he dropped thee on
the plain :

And he taketh his other forms, of the sea, of the
cloud, of the rain,

Of the beams of the sun and moon, of the high-
tossed forest trees

Whose boughs sweep the earth like billows, whose
voice is the voice of seas. 60

He upseals the evening sky with the chilly roses of
eve,

Pressed far on the infinite blue, and thus would he
deceive :

As if he would image to man another world of light,
Amidst his watery show—down rushes the curtain of
night.

Oh dust, thou art faithful to man, thou promisest
man no more
Than has been in the ancient age, in the years that
are gone before:
Thy coming is but for a moment, thy form is stern
and rude,
Thy essence an atom is, thy abiding is solitude.

Oh wind, thou art faithless to man, thou comest
and goest on earth,
Thou shakest these rude atoms into a transient
birth: 70
Thou bearest a double meaning: thy whisper drieth
the tear,
Thy voice brings tempest; but what thou sayest,
who can hear?

TO THE EARTH PLANET

THOU fliest far, thou fliest far
 Companion of each circling star,
 But yet thou dost but fill thy year :
 Thy orbit mayst thou not forsake,
 The path in space which thou must make,
 Till death shall touch thy charmed sphere.

Half turning to the weary blaze
 Which measures out thy countless days,
 Half bathing in the depths of night,
 Thou urgest thy unfaltering speed, 10
 As if thou wouldst of force be freed :
 But still thou art the slave of light.

Or moved or fixed in vacancy
 Thy pitying sisters gaze on thee,
 Where'er be sped thy wondrous race :
 Nigher to thee they may not come ;
 Their eyes weep light, their lips are dumb ;
 Time is their lord, their prison space.

Thy lord is Time ; to imitate
 Eternity, yet bring thy date : 20
 Space holds thee ; but seems infinite.
 But what of them ? Thy mystery,
 Or shared or not by them with thee,
 Lies in thy breast—thy parasite.

Art thou alone the planet, Earth,
That gives to being that new birth
Of which the womb is care and pain?
Lives man alone in that thick space
Which through thin space doth hugely race,
A clot that swims the immeasured main? 30

Who answers? Not the instruments,
To pierce all space which he invents,
And to untwist each ray that beats
From the fire-fountain of these things,
And those remoter sparks, whose wings
Win flame from nature's other seats.

THE SILENT HEAVENS

HERE I wander about, and here I mournfully
ponder :

Wearied to me is the sun, wearied the coming of
night :

Here is captivity still, there would be captivity
yonder :

Like to myself are the rest, smitten is all with
a blight.

Much I complain of my state to my own heart
heavily beating :

Much to the stars I complain : much to the
universe cold ;

The stars that of old were fixed, in spheres their
courses repeating ;

Solidly once were they fixed, and with them their
spheres were rolled.

Then through the space of the spheres to the stead-
fast empyrean

Echo on echo to Earth answered her manifold
cries : 10

Earth was the centre of things, and the throne of
all, or the pæan,

Bearing hell in her heart, on her bosom all life
that dies.

If they were fixed, as of old, in their firmament
solid and vaulted,

Then might the echo of woe or of laughter
reverberate thence :

Nor my voice alone, but to them all voices exalted,
Should with due answer be met, murmuring
sweet to the sense.

But they roll on their way through the void, the
inane unretentive :

Past them all voices stream into the echoless space.
Where is the pitying grace, that once was prayer's
incentive,

Where is the ear that heard, and the face that
once answered to face?

ODE ON THE DEATH OF DICKENS

BENEATH the invisible scourge
Of the south to foam upleaps the wave:
The tides hasten: the blasts urge
From the depth of their grey mysterious cave,
The white precipitate clouds, that seem made
More slowly to wander the sky, like a herd
Of deep-uddered cows hotly bayed
By a fierce dog beyond their own pace: but the bird
Turns seaward a sun-smitten wing;
For the storm and the calm are there, 10
That the blast and the sunbeam fling,
That contend in the gleam-shifting air.

Spirit, the thought of thee
 Shall lend to us thine eyes,
 Thy season ; see, oh, see
 From the howling summer skies
 How wintry the sounds that come !
 They shake the pink sea-thrift,
 They shake the heathery bloom
 That afar the sandhills lift.

Saidst thou not how near
Sorrow and joy, and peace and strife,
Darkness and light, the smile, the tear,
Death and life?

THE UNKNOWN KING

AN unknown king was holding court ;
 Wide was his sceptre, high his throne :
 Sorrow and pleasure made him sport,
 And yet he was a king unknown.

But one who went his earthly way
 Suddenly saw the form of him :
 Suddenly saw the wide array,
 Suddenly saw the splendour dim.

And as that wanderer gazed, the king
 Turned round, and cast an eye serene ; 10
 And stretched his sceptre, beckoning :—
 That man on earth no more was seen.

He entered in a wondrous hall,
 Whose shape was lost in utter size :
 He neared not the receding wall,
 And phantoms mocked his seeking eyes.

He felt at once both youth and age,
 The curious joy, the grey despair :
 Beginning thus a pilgrimage,
 Which seemed the forms of earth to wear. 20

He talked with phantoms of a sense
 That seemed like phantoms of the brain,
 And knew that in the void immense
 They too like him had secret pain.

That he to them a phantom seemed
 As they to him,

And so he turned to seek the king
 Who first had beckoned him to come :
 He saw him not and shuddering
 A moment felt the sense of doom. 30

And is it death, to see for once
 The awful monarch face to face,
 To give his summons one response.
 Then wander in a vacant place?

And do we cry in hope and fear
 'Then shall we know as we are known'?
 How are we known then? Who knows here
 Each thought, each word, each pain, each groan?

And who shall say the future life
 Shall end such things for evermore? 40
 Is not the ghost-world filled with strife?
 Shall not all be as heretofore?

TO HOPE

SONNET

FAIR Hope, that once, fair Hope, my prisoned
heart

Delightedst with thy lustre, piercing night
With eyelet twinkle, now thy former part

Renew, with thy one beam my heart delight :
Starlike, not sunlike, not scattering the dark,
Spreading in prisons, thee I ask to shine ;
Only to pierce, not scatter, with thy spark
As stars the night, such night wherein I pine.

Then move some space in heaven : but let thy beam
Solace me still : and I shall know and feel

Thy cluster near, the sisters of thy team,
Which in the night above our day do wheel :
Faith, love are there, where Hope on high doth glide,
Though further, fainter, in heaven's depth they ride.

TO PEACE

SONNET

O PEACE, O Dove, O shape of the Holy Ghost,
 I would not vex thee with too subtle thought,
 Put thee in fear by hopes, send thee to coast
 Regions unknown for what I dearest sought.
 To rough delights I would not open course,
 Nor thy composure fray with vague desire,
 Nor aspiration hold that did thee force,
 Nor move a step that I could not retire.

Nay, nay, I pray thee, close thy startled eye,
 Compose again thy self-stirred plumes, nor aim
 At other station, in timidity
 Of fancied plots, which here I all disclaim.
 Well, fly then! for perchance from heavenward flight
 Gentler on me thou mayst again alight.

HYMNS

I

O LORD my God, when sore bested
 My evil life I do bewail,
 What times the life I might have led
 Arising smites me like a flail :

When I regard the past of sin,
 Till sorrow drown me like despair ;
 The saint in me that might have been
 With that I am when I compare :

Then grant the life that might have been
 To be in fact through penitence ;
 All my past years discharged of sin,
 And spent in grace and innocence :

And grant that I, when I forecast,
 And shrink in fear of coming things,
 May take this comfort of the past,
 And lay it on my imaginings.

Amen.

II

[UNFINISHED]

PRIEST of the only Sacrifice,
 And Victim of the unmeasured price !
 What priest, what sacrifice appeared
 When 'Thou wast crucified and slain ?

The cross for malefactors reared
 Dispensed a malefactor's pain :
 Accusers watched, and nothing saw
 But the execution of the law.

Priest of the only Sacrifice,
 And Victim of the availing price !
 To meet thy steps no altar stood,
 No priest in sadder garb drew nigh ;
 No knife released thy pouring blood,
 No temple echoed with thy cry :
 No fire the one sin-offering great
 Consumed, from use to separate.

Priest of the only Sacrifice,
 And Victim of the unaltered price !
 No rite of ancient ordinance,
 Wool, hyssop, water running clean,
 Thy hidden offering sought to enhance,
 Nor sign of sacrifice was seen ;
 Not aught in which the human mind
 Might know the offering for mankind.

Priest of the only Sacrifice,
 And Victim of the exactest price !
 A little while, and faithful hearts
 Discerned the mystery hidden there
 Where Thou

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